

**2004 International Society of Travel and Tourism Educators
Annual Conference, 26 September 2004**

Welcoming Address

by Deputy Commissioner for Tourism, Duncan Pescod

Professor Scott, Prof Ko, Prof Chon, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be able to join you today at the start of the 2004 International Society of Travel and Tourism Educators (ISTTE) Annual Conference, held in Hong Kong for the first time. Let me extend a very warm welcome to you all to Asia's World City!

I would like to congratulate the Hong Kong Polytechnic University's School of Hotel Management and Tourism on its 25th Anniversary. I trust you all had a great Gala Dinner on Friday and that you are recovering from the late night! I would also like to commend Prof Kaye Chon and his team for bringing together such a distinguished group of International educators, scholars, industry executives and trainers.

Your task over the next few days is to explore issues relating to the teaching of travel and tourism skills at all levels. These are critical issues for an industry that is important worldwide.

The Hong Kong tourism industry has seen spectacular growth over the past few decades, from a mere 2.2 million visitors when the Hong Kong Polytechnic University first offered tourism related courses to over 15 million in 2003. This year we are expecting more than 20 million visitors!

To put this into context some 25.5 million inbound visitors are forecast for the UK¹ this year. Clearly Hong Kong is punching well above its weight!

This achievement would not have happened without the professionalism and the devotion of the people in the tourism. There is little doubt in my mind that the key to success in a service industry like tourism rests with the people who work in it. Of course, this does not happen by chance: it has long been recognized that well trained staff are essential to any successful business.

So there is no doubt we need trained people. The key question is how best to go about this? Let me say clearly, I don't claim to have an answer to this question. After all, this is why you are all here! But I do have some personal views. (There is an old saying that when it comes to education and travel, everyone is an expert!). So why do I feel education is so important?

Tourism is a customer-driven industry. To my mind, the appeal of a destination rests as much, if not more, on the standard of service given to its visitors than it does on the attractions on offer. This may sound odd coming from someone representing a Government that is investing so heavily in upgrading our tourism assets. But let me explain Disneyland is just a collection of structures without its cast-members. A hotel is just a series of rooms until the staff give it some character. A play is just words until it is brought to life by actors.

¹ Source : Visit Britain (the merged body of British Tourist Authority and the English Tourism Council)

From the Hong Kong Government's point of view, to maintain our role as Asia's world city and the most popular tourist destination in the Region, it is essential for us to have a truly professional and dedicated workforce to man our attractions. Only by setting the highest standards of service, can Hong Kong continue to differentiate itself from our competitors and to compete effectively.

The Government recognizes that the best way to achieve this is through education and is therefore investing heavily in education at all levels, to ensure that we have the people with the appropriate skills to work in the industry.

We have government-subsidized public and private training programmes at different levels to prepare people to work in all sectors of the industry. These include academic programmes offered by our universities – the Hong Kong Polytechnic University is a leading example in this area, - offering courses suitable for people working in restaurant and catering, marketing and promotion, even event management. We have specialized skill upgrading schemes for tour guides, and even a tailor-made one-year internship programme for tertiary students and new entrants to the industry. We have tourism education programmes in schools and vocational training institutions. Indeed, the Polytechnic University helped the Tourism Commission to develop one such teaching package recently.

Apart from the theoretical and practical training available through these programmes, I believe it is important that we feature at the core of all

our training efforts certain key principles relating to service quality and ethical behaviour.

I want all our visitors to remember Hong Kong not only for the spectacular harbour, the fine food and the exciting atmosphere, but also for the warmth and hospitality of our front-line staff and everyone they come across on the streets. The education sector has a key role to play in upgrading the standard of service quality in the tourism industry.

In the next few days, you will no doubt work hard to make this conference a success. I just want to take this opportunity to encourage you to take some time off to experience for yourself Asia's World City. As the native American saying goes "Tell me and I'll forget. Show me and I may not remember. Involve me, and I'll understand". Do take the time to really get to understand Hong Kong!

Thank you.

Tourism Commission

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